

Message Text

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AMCONSUL ZAGREB

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SUBJ: SLOVENE MINORITY CONTROVERSY: FROM IMPASSE TO POLITICAL
CRUNCH FOR SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERS

REF: VIENNA 0706

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ACT OF POLITICAL WILL OF GOA AND MAJOR
POLITICAL PARTIES IN CARINTHIA HAS BROKEN LONG-STANDING IMPASSE
ON BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS ISSUE. AGREEMENT ACHIEVED TO ERECT
BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS IN LARGER NUMBER (11) OF COMMUNITIES
THAN JUSTIFIED SOLELY (4) ON BASIS OF NOVEMBER 1976 LANGUAGE
CENSUS. AUSTRO-GERMAN NATIONALIST ELEMENTS HAVE RE-ENTERED
STRUGGLE BY DENOUNCING PROPOSED ARRANGEMENT AS SELLOUT TO
EXTREMIST SLAV GROUPS SUPPORTED BY YUGOSLAVIA. NEXT MOVE IS
UP TO SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERS WHO HAVE NOT ENDORSED
ARRANGEMENT AND WHO APPEAR TO BE WEIGHING OPTIONS:

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ACCEPT ARRANGEMENTS WITH VARIOUS SWEETENERS AS INCENTIVE
OR MAINTAIN ADVERSARY STANCE WITH NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS
FOR CARINTHIAN POLITICAL SCENE AND AUSTRO-YUGOSLAV
RELATIONS. RATIONAL BEHAVIOR HAS NOT MARKED ACTIONS OF
ALL PARTIES TO CONTROVERSY MANY TIMES IN PAST, ALTHOUGH
MOST CURRENT INDICATORS SUGGEST GUARDED OPTIMISM MAY NOW
BE WARRANTED ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR RESOLVING CONTROVERSY.

END SUMMARY.

2. FOLLOWING A TWO-MONTH HAITUS IN WAKE OF NOVEMBER 1976 LANGUAGE CENSUS, GOA HAS MOVED TO RECENT WEEKS TO BREAK IMPASSE OVER SLOVENE MINORITY CONTROVERSY, PARTICULARLY REGARDING ERECTION OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS. GOA AND NATIONAL LEADERS OF THREE POLITICAL PARTIES IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAVE SUCCEEDED IN PERSUADING THEIR PARTY ORGANIZATIONS IN CARINTHIA TO ACCEPT WHAT IS TERMED MORE GENEROUS ARRANGEMENT ON BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS. KEY EVENT TO ACHIEVEMENT OF CONSENSUS WAS STORMY SPECIAL MEETING OF FREEDOM PARTY'S (FPO) LEADERSHIP ON FEBRUARY 26 WHICH ONLY AGREED TO GO ALONG WITH GOA-NATIONAL PARTIES FORMULA AFTER PROVINCIAL CHAIRMAN THREATENED TO RESIGN IF CONSENSUS WORKED OUT IN VIENNA NOT SUPPORTED.

3. TO DOCUMENT THIS UNDERSTANDING AND KEEP THREE PARTIES IN SAME HARNESS, CHARMEN OF THREE POLITICAL PARTIES IN CARINTHIA SENT LETTER DATED MARCH 1 TO CHANCELLOR INFORMING KREISKY OF THEIR AGREEMENT TO ERECTION OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS IN NINE COMMUNITIES (91 VILLAGES AND SETTLEMENTS) AND USE OF SLOVENE LANGUAGE IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDINGS AND BEFORE COURTS IN 14 COMMUNITIES OF LOWER CARINTHIA ARRANGEMENT ON ROAD SIGNS AND LANGUAGE USE OVERCOMES FOR MOST PART SUCCESSFUL BOYCOTT BY SLOVENE MINORITY OF NOVEMBER 1976 LANGUAGE CENSUS SINCE STRICT APPLICATION OF CENSUS RETURNS WOULD HAVE JUSTIFIED ERECTION OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS IN ONLY 4 COMMUNITIES.

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LETTER MAKES POINT THAT ARRANGEMENTS CORRESPOND TO REALITIES IN CARINTHIA, PROVIDE EQUALITY OF TREATMENT OF CITIZENRY AND ACCORD FULLY WITH 1955 STATE TREATY. ON BASIS OF ARRANGEMENTS, GOA AND FEDERAL PARLIAMENT CAN NOW GO FORWARD WITH PREPARATION OF IMPLEMENTING ORDINANCES PROVIDED FOR IN MINORITIES LEGISLATION ADOPTED IN JULY 1976. (VIENNA 5712).

4. FOREGOING ROAD SIGN AND LANGUAGE USE ARRANGEMENTS HOWEVER DO NOT HAVE ENDORSEMENT OF SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERSHIP. AT LAST MEETING OF CONTACT COMMISSION IN MID-FEBRUARY, ATTENDED BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES AND SLOVENE MINORITY REPRESENTATIVES, SPOKESMEN FOR LATTER PUT FORWARD DEMAND FOR ERECTION OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS IN 25 COMMUNITIES AND SUGGESTED ISSUE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS WAS MORE PRESSING MATTER THAN THAT OF ROAD SIGNS. SAME SPOKESMEN ALSO SUGGESTED THEY WOULD PROBABLY OPPOSE SLOVENE-SPEAKING AUSTRIANS

BECOMING MEMBERS OF LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCILS, AS FORESEEN IN PROMOTION-OF-MINORITIES LEGISLATION, ON BASIS OF FACT THEY WERE NOT CONSULTED IN FINAL STAGES OF DEVELOPIN LEGISLATION ON ADVISORY BODIES AND ABSENCE OF ANY REQUIREMENT IN STATE TREATY FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF ADVISORY BODIES IN CONNECTION WITH EXERCISE OF FULL MINORITY RIGHTS. THERE IS ALSO LIKELIHOOD THAT SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERSHIP WILL CHALLENGE MINORITIES LEGISLATION IN COURTS AND THEREFORE WOULD FEEL MEMBERSHIP IN SUCH BODIES COULD BE INTERPRETED AS THEIR ENDORSEMENT OF LEGAL CORRECTNESS OF THESE BODIES.

5. AUSTRO-GERMAN NATIONALIST ELEMENTS (HEIMATDIENST) IN CARINTHIA, WHO HAVE BEEN LARGELY SILENT SINCE NOVEMBER 1976 LANGUAGE CENSUS, ANNOUNCED MARCH 1, IN WAKE OF CARINTHIAN THREEY-PARTY AGREEMENT, THEY WOULD
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SOON HOLD SPECIAL MEETING OF THEIR ORGANIZATION TO DEAL WITH NEW SITUATION. PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT SETTING FORTH THEIR GENERAL POSITION DECRIED THREE-PARTY ARRANGEMENT AS ATTEMPT BY CARINTHIAN GOVERNMENT TO FORCE ON POPULATION AN ARRANGEMENT NOT IN ACCORD WITH RESULTS OF NOVEMBER 14 LANGUAGE CENSUS (ONLY FOUR COMMUNITIES ELIGIBLE FOR ROAD SIGNS) AND AS OFFERING THREATENING PROSPECT OF USE OF SLOVENE LANGUAGE IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDINGS IN MANY MORE COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING CAPITAL, THAN 14 NOW FORESEEN. HEIMATDIENST EFFORT IS AIMED AT GENERATING POLITICAL TENSIONS AND DISCORD UNDER GUISE OF PROTECTING AUSTRO-GERMAN CULTURAL-NATIONAL HERITAGE WITH REAL PURPOSE OF MAINTAINING POLITICAL POWER OF NATIONALIST ELEMENTS IN CARINTHIA.

6. OUTLOOK. MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS ON SLOVENE MINORITY CONTROVERSY SEEM ON BALANCE ENCOURAGING, AFTER LENGTHY IMPASSE GENERATED BY DESTRUCTION OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS IN 1972. ENGAGEMENT OF POLITICAL WILL OF GOA TOWARD PROMOTING SETTLEMENT OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGN ISSUE MAY RELATE TO SHORT-TERM GOA OBJECTIVE TO ESTABLISH DEFENSIBLE RECORD ON CONTROVERSY FOR BELGRADE 77 GATHERING. SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERSHIP, FOR ITS PART, IS NOW FACED WITH ALTERNATIVES: (1) ACCEPT PROPOSED ARRANGEMENT AS PROBABLY BEST ACHIEVABLE AND JOIN ADVISORY COUNCILS AND THEREBY WORK WITHIN POLITICAL ESTABLISH- MENT TOWARD GOALS OF PROTECTING AND PROMOTING MINORITY RIGHTS OR (2) REJECT ARRANGEMENT AND ADOPT ADVERSARY POSITION. LATTER POSITION WOULD PROBABLY REQUIRE

YUGOSLAV SUPPORT TO MAINTAIN; IT WOULD ALSO IMPLY
CONTINUING DIFFICULTY BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND AUSTRIA
ON ISSUE, INCREASED LIKELIHOOD OF SUBSEQUENT
PROCEEDINGS BEFORE AUSTRIAN COURTS AND THE GOOD
POSSIBILITY STILL LATER OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF
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ISSUE ACTIONS AND WORDS OF SLOVENE MINORITY
LEADERSHIP AT THIS JUNCTURE INDICATE THAT
REVIEW OF OPTIONS IS NOW UNDERWAY. RATIONAL BEHAVIOR
HAS NOT IN PAST BEEN BASIS FOR MOST DECISIONS OF
PARTIES TO CONTROVERSY; IT IS THEREFORE PREMATURE TO
VENTURE THAT SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERS WILL
NECESSARILY BECOME STATESMANLIKE AT THIS JUNCTURE
ALTHOUGH MOST INDICATORS SUGGEST GUARDED OPTIMISM
MAY BE IN ORDER.BUCHANAN

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